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GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE

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**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL
EVALUATION OF THE COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE AND ITS
NETWORKS**

BACKGROUND

1. Initially only an external evaluation of the SIPAM network (Information System for the Promotion of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean) was proposed at the Third Session of the Committee on Aquaculture (Zaragoza, Spain, 25-27 September 2002; see paragraph 36 of the report provided as GFCM:CAQ/IV/2004/Inf.4). This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by the Commission at its Twenty-seventh Session (Rome, Italy, 19-22 November 2002; see paragraph 83 of the report provided as GFCM:CAQ/IV/2004/Inf.5). The Committee initiated actions towards the evaluation of SIPAM at the Seventh SIPAM Annual Meeting (Casablanca, Morocco, 19-20 September 2003) (see section on 'External Evaluation of SIPAM' of the meeting report provided as GFCM:CAQ/IV/2004/Inf.10) where it was agreed that the Secretariat would identify an external evaluator, and seek the necessary funds.

2. During the Twenty-eight Session of the Commission (Tangiers, Morocco, 14-17 October 2003; see paragraph 43 of the report provided as GFCM:CAQ/IV/2004/Inf.6), the Secretariat was additionally requested to consider undertaking a full external evaluation of the whole activities of CAQ, in addition to SIPAM, especially its *modus operandi* since its inception in 1996 considering the probable entry into force of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) autonomous budget in the near future.

3. The Secretariat organized the external evaluation during December 2003 and January 2004. The evaluation exercise was carried out in two separate phases by the consultant. The initial and main part focused on the evaluation of the SIPAM network through the examination of relevant documents and interviews with SIPAM staff in the Regional Office in Tunis, staff from the GFCM Secretariat in Rome, the SIPAM National Coordinators of Cyprus, Greece, Italy,

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Tunisia and Turkey, as well as representatives of the private sector in selected countries. The overall CAQ evaluation was conducted through a desk study of relevant documents, discussion with staff from the GFCM Secretariat and correspondence with the Coordinator of the SELAM and TECAM networks (Socio-Economic and Legal Aspects of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean / Technology of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean).

4. Following the completion of the evaluation exercise an Ad hoc Meeting of Experts on the External Evaluation of the GFCM Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ) and its Networks was held in Rome, Italy, from 29 to 30 March 2004. The meeting was attended by six experts in their personal capacity, whose selection took into account both geographical balance and proper representation of the CAQ networks (Mr J.-P. Blancheton, France – also current CAQ Chairperson; Mr B. Basurco, Spain – also TECAM and SELAM Administrator; Mr S. Cataudella, Italy; Mr I. Katavić, Croatia; Mr Mohd. S. Hadj Ali, Tunisia – also SIPAM Regional Coordinator; and Ms D. Stephanou, Cyprus), and staff from the Secretariat.

5. The report of the ad hoc Group of Experts, which includes the full report of the independent consultant, is provided to the Committee members as information session document GFCM:CAQ/IV/2004/Inf.12 as recommended. However, the Group acknowledged that both reports should be formally considered external from CAQ and may not necessarily reflect the opinion and recommendations of the Committee.

6. The report of the independent consultant includes an executive summary with the main body of the report focusing on the mandate of CAQ and its role and status within GFCM, its formal activities and achievements and its weaknesses and constraints. The final part of the report lists a number of specific recommendations made based on the results of the general evaluation of CAQ and the more detailed appraisal of SIPAM. The main annexes attached to this report are the terms of references of the external evaluator, the results of the external evaluation of SIPAM and the summarized activities of the TECAM and SELAM networks.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AD HOC MEETING OF EXPERTS

7. Following a brief presentation of the report of the Consultant, the Group of Experts considered the report of the consultant useful for their self-assessment of the status of CAQ. The Group noted that the presentation stressed that:

- CAQ provides a unique forum for the GFCM member countries to advice on Mediterranean aquaculture and its role should be enhanced.
- In view of the growing importance of aquaculture in the Region, the work of the CAQ has been dealt as a rather marginal activity within the overall work of the Commission.
- The CAQ networks have played a significant but unquantifiable role in the development of aquaculture in the Region.
- Gratitude is due to the Government of Tunisia for hosting the regional coordination office of the SIPAM network since its inception.
- The activities of the SELAM and TECAM networks have been mainly financed by CIHEAM-IAMZ (International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza, Spain) with support of FAO Fisheries Department.
- The SELAM and TECAM networks have been coordinated by CIHEAM-IAMZ and relied heavily on the voluntary participation of individuals from other institutions and organizations.
- The activities under the EAM network (Environment Aspects of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean) have been only partly addressed by the TECAM and SELAM networks;

however, bearing in mind the importance of environmental matters, the network should be resumed and operated as a separate entity.

- The SIPAM network and its databases remain an extremely valuable tool to assist the development and management of regional aquaculture, but has yet to fulfil its potential and achieve credibility in the light of the present unsatisfactory level of national commitment and financial support.
- The *modus operandi* of the Committee through the current intersessional activities of its networks is inadequate to address relevant policy issues on a regional basis.
- The CAQ networks activities should be strengthened and re-assessed and should establish active working groups to deal with various and pressing issues of regional concern.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CAQ

8. The Group of Experts noted that the main weakness of CAQ is related to its current structure and a series of external constraints, over which CAQ had no control. In particular, the activities of all of its networks have mainly been possible only because of the generous contributions made by and through FAO, by CIHAEM-IAMZ and by the Tunisian Government. The Group noted that the lack of clear terms of reference, the absence of an autonomous budget and of secured national financial support of its member countries, and limited data submission to SIPAM have been examples of external constraints to CAQ. The salient strengths and weaknesses of the Committee itself and its networks are summarized without any ranking in the tables below.

Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ)

Strengths	Weaknesses
Provides a unique forum for disciplinary developments for the GFCM member countries on Mediterranean aquaculture.	General policy and strategy formulation role inadequately pursued. Terms of reference of CAQ at regional and national levels inadequate.
Has established four networks (SIPAM, TECAM, SELAM and EAM).	Networks not used as tools for policy issue discussion and implementation. Liaison and collaboration among the networks inadequate. EAM discontinued. Its activities have been partly addressed by the other networks.
Geared to play a significant role in the discussion over issues of regional concern (e.g. bluefin tuna farming).	Programme of work rubberstamped by GFCM without securing financial support. Activities constrained by funding difficulties.
Ability to draw upon national expertise, particularly through its networks.	Insufficient strategic planning in its work plan based on the action plan that stemmed from the application of Article 9 of the FAO CCRF in the Mediterranean.
Activities carried out exclusively on a voluntary basis, with the establishment of powerful 'human networks'.	Limited involvement of the stakeholders and insufficient commitment assigned including funding for regional activities and projects.
Has the potential to be a reference committee providing scientific views on the state of regional aquaculture resources and development advice.	The plan of action that stemmed from the application of Article 9 of the FAO CCRF in the Mediterranean was poorly addressed and found no donors.
Provides capacity building, technical training and information exchange.	The roles and responsibilities of various players (Chair, Vice-chairs, Focal Points, individual scientists, Secretariat, etc.) not clearly defined.
Has established a most useful information network for regional information exchange and communication through the internet.	Inadequate data analysis at national and regional level and the failure to properly address aquaculture issues of regional relevance.

Information System for the Promotion of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean (SIPAM)

Strengths	Weaknesses
Original concept was sound and remains a valuable tool to assist further development and management of aquaculture in the region.	The opportunities which the network provides have not yet been fully exploited bearing in mind that the system has been running for eight years.
A significant group of information gatherers (the 'human network') has been established, encouraged, trained and supported.	Limited involvement of the stakeholders and inadequate commitment by the participating GFCM member countries.
Coordinated since its inception by a regional office hosted and supported by the Tunisian Government.	Vague internal management structure with no clear terms of reference for the regional or national staff.
Valuable regional sets of data collected and made available through the SIPAM website.	Submission of incomplete and unvalidated information from the member countries.
The new website emphasises the potential strength of this information system.	The new website exposes its current weaknesses to the world.
Potentially, its statistical data are more detailed and more frequently and quickly available than FAO official statistics.	Not used as tool for diagnosis and analysis at national and regional level. Incomplete and invalidated submission of data from some member countries.
---	Liaison between SIPAM and the other CAQ networks inadequate and should be reinforced.
---	Discrepancy between SIPAM statistical data and those collected by the FAO Fisheries Information and Data Service (FIDI).
---	Decline in staff enthusiasm because of funding difficulties and the consequent limitation, after many years, of SIPAM to fulfil its potential.

Technology of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean (TECAM) and Socio-Economic and Legal Aspects of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean (SELAM)

Strengths	Weaknesses
Activities have been extensive and have certainly contributed to capacity building in the region.	Although the networks have been significantly supported by CIHEAM-IAMZ with support from FAO the provision of funds is inconsistent.
Successfully dealt with regional cooperation and transfer of technical know-how through its training activities.	Has relied on the voluntary participation of experts from other institutions and organizations with no clear commitment from member countries.
Over 1 000 participants have attended TECAM and SELAM activities. Support from CIHEAM and FAO has facilitated the attendance of numerous participants from GFCM member countries, whose attendance would have been otherwise difficult.	The level of activities is related to the availability of funding. The current financial support from CIHEAM-IAMZ remains insufficient.
Since the beginning, they have been successfully coordinated by CIHEAM-IAMZ which has provided substantial human and financial resources.	The regular discussion of issues of regional concern is insufficiently addressed by the networks as they do not operate through ad hoc working groups.
The work and information has been widely diffused regionally through issues of the CIHEAM journal.	Liaison and collaboration among the networks and particularly with SIPAM remains inadequate.
Have conducted a number of regional surveys that have provided opportunities for collaboration within the region.	Have conducted a number of regional surveys that have provided opportunities for collaboration that have not yet been completely followed up.
Have successfully engaged the voluntary participation and services of specialists from other institutions and organizations.	Participation of experts in the organization of activities from the southern Mediterranean countries still limited.

Environmental Aspects of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean (EAM)

Strengths	Weaknesses
Set up with the aim to create an entity dealing with regional environmental matters. Growing importance of regional environmental issues related to aquaculture growth in the region.	Funding difficulties and consequential failure to carry out substantial activities as a separate entity.

OPTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

9. The Group of Experts acknowledged that the evaluation report of the Consultant has been the starting point for discussion on the potential role of CAQ and its networks and its current limitations. Based on the external evaluation the Experts agreed on salient recommendations aimed at improving the role of CAQ that could be adequately addressed at the Fourth Session of CAQ and subsequently at the Twenty-ninth Session of the Commission. These recommendations appear below.

10. In view of the establishment of an autonomous budget, the Commission should ensure that the GFCM member countries clearly define the role of the Committee, its networks and the activities that it should implement in order for the Committee to establish itself as truly useful forum for regional discussion on aquaculture development in the Region.

11. It was agreed that the effectiveness of the Committee has declined over the last few years as its networks have mainly focused on training, exchange of information, and on technical issues rather than dealing with policy and strategic issues of regional concern. The Committee should focus on designing an aquaculture policy shared between all Mediterranean countries, where strategic issues are discussed and adequately dealt with. It was suggested that the prioritization of common issues among the GFCM member countries would facilitate the identification of support funding from donor countries and relevant agencies.

12. CAQ should remain an independent entity from SAC and should be reinforced through a more precise mandate on other important activities in Mediterranean related to the sustainable development of the aquaculture industry such as coastal management, environmental issues, quality and sanitary issues, health management aspects, and interactions between fisheries and aquaculture.

13. CAQ should concentrate its activities on issues of strategic importance for regional aquaculture development including guidelines for national and/or regional projects through an expanded role of its current networks which should include the establishment of ad hoc working groups to deal with strategic issues.

In relation to its overall function, the ad hoc Meeting of Experts recommended that CAQ should:

- Urge GFCM to recognise the increasing importance of aquaculture in the Region through providing CAQ with a similar level of attention to that provided to capture fisheries through the SAC.
- Invite GFCM to devote an adequate amount from its autonomous budget for its aquaculture activities and networks that is proportionate to its current and future regional importance.
- Ensure that CAQ is properly represented by its Chairperson or by one of its Vice-Chairpersons, and its Technical Secretary at GFCM meetings.
- Monitor and support the activities of all its networks more closely and strengthen their coordination and synergy.

- Ensure that all CAQ networks strengthen and expand their current role to ensure that they effectively operate as entities dealing with technical, socio-economic and legal issues as well as information in a wider sense including policy issues.
- A focused and separate entity dealing with environmental matters should also be urgently re-established (EAM) to ensure that pressing environmental aspects related to aquaculture development are clearly addressed as the pressure on the coastal zone is rising.
- In its formal meetings, concentrate on strategic issues of regional importance to aquaculture rather than simply receiving reports of network activities and approving their future programmes. Preservation of the *status quo* is not enough. CAQ should be ready to propose other initiatives to address issues of regional importance.

In relation to the specific duties of its TECAM, SELAM and EAM networks, the ad hoc Meeting of Experts recommended that CAQ should:

- Urge, through GFCM, Members to enhance their support to the aquaculture networks by providing sufficient resources and by requesting the aquaculture institutions and organizations within their countries to offer further support to the activities of TECAM and SELAM.
- In view of the regional importance of environmental matters, re-establish EAM as a separate entity dealing with aquaculture environmental issues.
- Broaden the terms of reference of TECAM and SELAM, which are currently mainly concerned with training and information activities (courses, seminars, workshops, etc.), so that they form true networks within which ad hoc working groups to discuss issues of strategic and regional importance.
- Should CIHEAM continue to support and host TECAM and SELAM networks make no substantial changes in the current work of TECAM and SELAM under the administration of CIHEAM-IAMZ.
- Make long term contingency plans to cover the eventuality that CIHEAM and/or FAO may not be able to continue their significant support for TECAM and SELAM during this interim phase.

The ad hoc Meeting of Experts also recommended that CAQ should take the following actions that are specific to the SIPAM network:

- Request GFCM to provide the utmost support for SIPAM because it is a significant asset that will enhance the future development and management of responsible aquaculture management in the Mediterranean; this implies strong commitment by Member Countries and the provision of financial support on a regional and national basis.
- However, if a much higher level of national support cannot be urgently agreed, suggest that GFCM should terminate SIPAM activities as soon as possible rather than continue an activity which shows promise but fails to deliver. This action should be regarded as a last resort.
- Acknowledge the efforts of the Tunisian Government for its substantial support for SIPAM to date but, noting that Tunisia can not host and support the SIPAM Regional Centre *ad infinitum* and that different skills are now necessary to bring SIPAM into the “age of information” and that care needs to be taken not to duplicate efforts and waste valuable staff and financial resources, should re-locate the Regional Centre within the GFCM Secretariat. However, given that the GFCM new structure and autonomous budget are still

under discussion, the Regional Centre should remain in Tunisia during the interim period until its relocation will be properly addressed. In the meantime the Regional Centre requires the services of an information officer to strengthen the collection and analysis of regional aquaculture information and data.

- Request GFCM, in addition to providing financial support from its own autonomous budget, to authorise the SIPAM Regional Centre to solicit private funding for its activities.
- Prepare and agree on written terms of reference for the Regional and National Coordinators and establish an up-to-date and clear operational structure for SIPAM.
- Abolish the SIPAM Coordination Committee and ask the SIPAM Regional Centre to assume its functions.
- Through GFCM, ask Member Countries to nominate National Coordinators that are committed to the objectives of SIPAM.
- Through GFCM, ask each Member Country to set up an efficient national SIPAM network and provide their National Coordinators with an adequate budget that covers both national duties and travel to regional SIPAM meetings.
- Invite the SIPAM Regional Centre to assist SIPAM National Coordinators in developing clear terms of reference and operational guidelines for the National Networks.
- Invite all National Coordinators to supply information on a more frequent basis and seek national government support to do so.
- Reduce the frequency of the meetings of SIPAM National Coordinators so that they become biennial events.
- Invite the SIPAM Regional Centre to concentrate on completing and refining information from fully cooperating members rather than trying to add further Member Countries

14. Finally, the Group of Experts noted that, until the adoption of an appropriate autonomous budget, the future structure and mode of operation of the Committee may very well be mainly a theoretical question. In the context of the autonomous budget, the size and composition of an expanded GFCM Secretariat could have an influence on the structure and operation of the CAQ and its networks.

SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMITTEE

15. The Committee is invited to deliberate on the conclusions of the external evaluation of the Committee on Aquaculture and its networks and either endorse the proposed recommendations or propose new ones.